VISIT…

A DARK AND STORMY KNIGHT

A Short Adventure for Four 1st-Level Player Characters

CREDITS

Design:	Owen K.C. Stephens
Editing:	Penny Williams
Typesetting:	Nancy Walker
Cartography:	Nick Isaac
Web Production	Julia Martin
Web Development:	Mark A. Jindra
Graphic Design:	Sean Glenn, Cynthia Fliege

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The unusually violent storms in these parts often drive motley collections of intelligent beings to take shelter together for a time. The tradition of storm-peace ensures that all grudges are suspended for the duration of the storm. But some shelters are safer than others, and not all beings honor the storm-peace. Can the PCs solve the mystery of the tor in which they have taken shelter before the storm ends?

A *Dark and Stormy Knight* is a short adventure for four 1st-level characters. The scenario is set in a barren wilderness area that features one or more tors, or free-standing hills. The action takes place inside one of these tors that has been hollowed out and used as a tomb in the past. As always, feel free to adapt the material presented here as you see fit to make it work with your campaign.

PREPARATION

You (the DM) need the D&D core rulebooks—the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*—to run this adventure. The scenario utilizes the D&D v.3.5 rules.

To get started, print out the adventure, including the map. Read through the scenario at least once to familiarize yourself with the situation, threats, and major NPCs in the tower (particularly their motivations).

Text that appears in shaded boxes is player information that you can read aloud or paraphrase for the players at the proper times.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Long ago, a small but mighty humanoid kingdom existed in what is now the local wilderness. Bugbear and ogre warriors fought brutal wars of expansion, earning great fame and amassing considerable fortunes from their predations. Those who died in battle were buried in large tomb complexes dug into hillsides and honored as patrons of the living. Among these tombs was the large tor known as Hightower. Though it was neither the largest nor the most famous of the kingdom's tombs, Hightower did represent a typical example of this kind of structure.

As happens to all such nations, the cruel humanoid kingdom eventually fell to a more powerful foe that razed all its cities and outlying fortifications. Of the tombs, only Hightower escaped destruction—largely because it was an unimportant monument in a remote location.

A few tribes of humanoids that survived the devastation tried to use it as a fortress, but the humans with whom they clashed defeated them soundly and sealed the entrance with a huge, round stone to ensure that the tor could no longer be used as a base. Since then, Hightower has served as a landmark for travelers in the know, but it has otherwise been largely forgotten. An enterprising group of tomb robbers once dug an access shaft from the top of the tor down into the tombs, but its members did not leave Hightower alive, and only small rodents and vermin have used the shaft since.

But the electrical storms that have plagued the area in recent days have been quite severe, and a few weeks ago, a stray lightning bolt broke open the stone seal. A few humanoids have since wandered into the tor, and the ancient bugbear warrior buried in the lowest crypt has risen as a zombie to deal with these intruders.

Tonight, yet another terrible storm is sweeping through the wilderness, driving all creatures to take shelter where they can find it. Hightower looms on the horizon, and its door is no longer blocked. Will the PCs dare to enter its silent halls?

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The characters take shelter inside a hollowed-out tor during a violent storm. While they are camped in the outer chamber, the storm breaks open one of the inner doors, allowing access to the humanoid tombs within the tor. After defeating the various monsters that have taken up residence there and the hobgoblin raiders who intend to make the tor their new base, the PCs encounter the Dark Knight himself—a hobgoblin zombie interred in the tor's deepest chamber.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

As DM, you know best how to involve your PCs in an adventure. In this case, the simplest hook is that the PCs are driven to seek shelter in Hightower because of a storm. Using this technique offers a means of getting the PCs together for the first time if need be, since they need not be traveling together before the adventure begins. Since Hightower is clearly visible for miles, characters may even be going in different directions before the storm hits.

If a random gathering to escape a storm doesn't work for your campaign, you can use one of the following suggestions to draw them into the action.

- The PCs have been asked to scout out Hightower to see whether any groups of humanoids have begun using it as a fortification again.
- The characters found a map showing Hightower and its environs on the body of a brigand or in an old chest.
- A wealthy patron has hired the PCs to recover a family heirloom thought to have been interred with a long-dead ancestor in Hightower.

STORM-PEACE

The custom of storm-peace evolved long ago in response to the sudden and severe storms that plague this area. All characters native to the region should already be aware of it. If you plan to use the concept of storm-peace in this adventure, be sure to explain it to the players before beginning play.

The basic concept is that an automatic truce exists between all individuals and groups who seek shelter in neutral territory during a lightning storm. Such weather is simply too dangerous for fighting, regardless of people's feelings toward one other. Storm-peace is assumed to be in effect unless someone specifically rejects it. Even so, whenever two strangers meet during a lightning storm, they often greet one another by asking "Storm-peace?" simply to ensure that the other knows and respects the tradition.

Storm-peace applies to any thinking humanoid, though not necessarily to other creatures. Many people assume, however, that it applies to any creature able to ask for it, and many legends tell of bards singing songs to dragons or other dangerous monsters during a storm-peace. Any character who makes a successful DC 15 Knowledge (arcana) check knows and can repeat at least one or two such legends.

Storm-peace is not a critical concept for this adventure, and you can certainly run the scenario without it as long as you have another way of drawing the PCs together. However, it's a convenient tool for bringing together PCs who may not initially trust each other. An elf, a half-orc, and a dwarf might normally balk at spending the night in the same building, but this ancient truce should produce enough trust to enable such characters to bond.

BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

A *Dark and Stormy Knight* is primarily a site-based adventure, though it begins with a storm of legendary proportions. Once the PCs seek shelter in Hightower, the action continues there.

THE STORM

The adventure can begin at any time of day. Read or paraphrase the following when the storm hits.

> The sky has been slowly darkening all day, and the smell of rain has been thick in the air. Now it has finally begun to fall, accompanied by loud peals of thunder that seem to roll across the landscape. The sun is hidden behind massive stormclouds, and a cold wind blows from the north. As bolts of lightning begin to slam from cloud to ground and pieces of hail begin to strike the earth, the need for shelter becomes obvious.
>
> Ahead in the distance, a large tor rises from the ground, its form illuminated by the occasional lightning bolt. It seems rocky and solid, and though climbing it in this weather would be folly, it might have some outcropping that would provide safety from the storm. The only alternative is to endure the weather.

Any character who makes a successful DC 10 bardic knowledge check or DC 15 Knowledge (architecture and engineering, dungeoneering, local, history, or nobility and royalty) check can identify this tor as Hightower and recall its history as given in the Adventure Background.

If PCs balk at heading for the tor, bring the weather rules (see page 93 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) into play. Once the hail gets bad enough to deal lethal damage, the characters may become more willing to run for cover.

HIGHTOWER

The following sections describe the tor and the tombs within. Unless otherwise noted, all areas are unlit, and the walls, floors, and ceilings are made of worked stone.

1. HIGHTOWER MAIN ENTRANCE

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs come within 20 feet of Hightower.

> The massive tor towers above the surrounding country. A few narrow ledges offer scant protection from the elements, but a closer inspection reveals a massive, arched entryway at least 20 feet tall and 10 feet wide, set into the side of the hill. The ground just outside it slopes away from the doorway, directing the falling water out and away. Given this fact and the sturdy nature of the hill, whatever space lies beyond the door should be both dry and safe from lightning and hail. The construction seems quite sturdy, so the likelihood of collapse, even in severe conditions such as these, is remote.

Any character who makes a DC 12 Search or Knowledge (architecture and engineering) check can determine that the stonework of the doorway and the surrounding area is indeed very strong. A dwarf can determine the same information via stonecunning.

A DC 15 Spot check reveals the broken remains of an immense, round stone scattered across the ground near the entrance. This stone once blocked the doorway, but it was blasted apart by lightning some weeks ago.

The door is heavy but well counterweighted. It is unlocked and opens easily, and it swings shut of its own accord unless propped open.

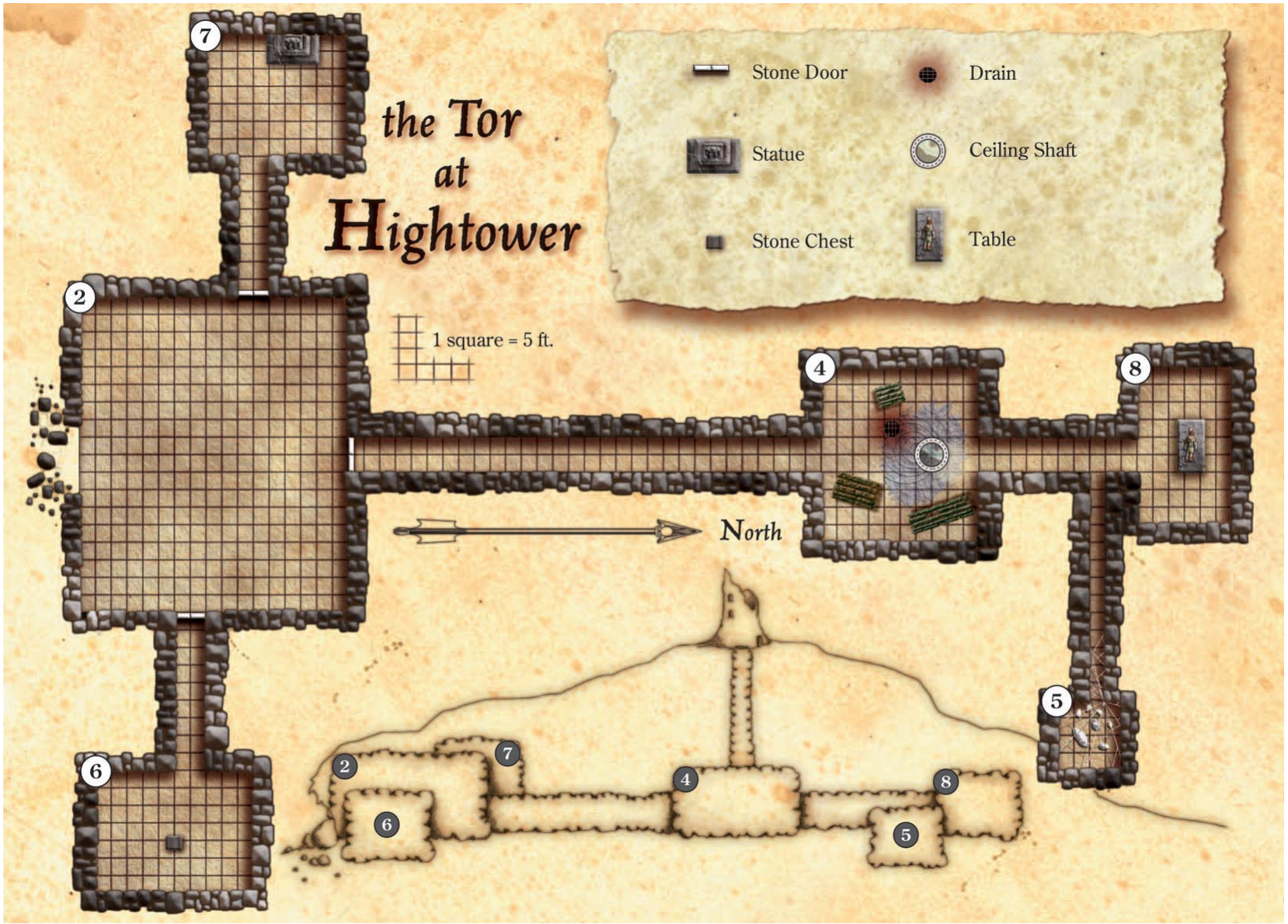
2. HIGHTOWER MAIN HALL

Read or paraphrase the following once the PCs have entered Hightower.

> The stone chamber beyond the entrance measures at least ten paces square. Peeling paint and broken scrollwork suggest that it was once decorated with some care, but now only dust remains. Three massive stone doors—one each to the left and right, and one directly across from the entrance—lead deeper into the tor.

Each of the three doors is locked, and the DC for the required Open Lock check is high enough to be beyond the capabilities of even a talented 1st-level character. If the PCs arrive at different times, let them all get to this point before moving on to encounter 3. If they seem interested in talking, let them introduce themselves and perhaps set up camp in this chamber. Proceed to encounter 3 when they are ready to go on.

Doors: 4 in. thick, hardness 8, hp 60, break DC 28, Open Lock 30.


the Tor at Hightower
Stone Door
Drain
Statue
Ceiling Shaft
Stone Chest
Table
1 square = 5 ft.
North
7
2
4
8
6
5

3. RAT RACE (EL 2)

This encounter is not noted on the map. It occurs in area 2 at a time of the DM's choosing, sometime after all the PCs have arrived there.

The sound of hissing rain, pounding hail, and howling wind from outside is interrupted only by the occasional loud crack of thunder. Still, this room seems stable enough for the most part. Even when the thunder seems to shake the very ground, not so much as a mote of dust filters down from the ceiling. The doors leading into the tor, however, do show signs of weakness, seeming to tremble with every thunderclap.

Suddenly, in conjunction with a particularly loud thunderclap, all three doors break open at once, falling from their doorways into the room with a great cacophony. Seconds later, the sounds of squeaking fill the air as a pack of rats swarms in from the largest doorway.

A bolt of lightning has opened a crevice in the next room, flooding a rat nest there.

Creatures: Eight rats swarm into the chamber, seeking a way out.

Rats (8): hp 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1; see *Monster Manual*, page 278.

Tactics: Panicked by the thunder and the flooding of their nest, the rats attack the nearest targets they see, though no more than three pile onto any one target. Even though a rat can deal only 1d3–4 points of damage with its bite, each such attack still deals a minimum of 1 point. If a rat is injured but not killed, it flees on its next move action.

Treasure: This chamber contains no treasure. The gp value of the treasure for this encounter has been spread around to other areas inside the tor.

4. PREPARATION CHAMBER (EL 1)

Read or paraphrase the following aloud when the PCs enter this area.

The long stone hall ends in a stone chamber furnished only with cracked, moldering tables on which lie rusted implements of iron. Rain falls into the middle of the room from a shaft in the ceiling that must run all the way to the top of the tor. From the bottom of the shaft dangles a rope, swinging slightly. A drain in the center of the floor allows the water to escape, but old, dark stains suggest that it was used to carry away other fluids long ago.

Suddenly, from a doorway on the far side of the room step two burly humanoids. Each stands more than 6 feet tall and has feral eyes and flat facial features. With a roar, the two draw their weapons and charge.

The rope does indeed lead up to the top of the tor. Climbing it requires a DC 15 Climb check. Inspection of the area surrounding the shaft's upper opening, however, reveals only the wrecked remains of a hobgoblin camp. The shaft was dug out by tomb robbers long ago to provide easy access to the riches within the tor.

Creatures: The two hobgoblins have no intention of honoring the storm-peace. They intend to establish a brigand camp here, and witnesses to their arrival cannot be allowed to live.

Hobgoblin Raiders (2): Male hobgoblin warrior 1; CR 1/2; Medium humanoid (goblinoid); HD 1d8+2; hp 6, 7; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 15, touch 11, flat-footed 14; Base Atk +1; Grp +2; Atk or Full Atk +2 melee (1d6+1/19–20, short sword) or +2 ranged (1d6+1, javelin); SQ darkvision 60 ft.; AL CE; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will –1; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Hide +1, Listen +2, Move Silently +3, Spot +2; Alertness.

Possessions: Studded leather armor, light shield, short sword, javelin.

Tactics: The hobgoblins simply charge into combat, attacking the biggest and most threatening targets first.

Treasure: One of the hobgoblins has a *lifting belt* (see Appendix).

5. WHAT A TANGLED WEB (EL 1)

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter the corridor leading up to this room.

At the end of this hallway is a small chamber whose wooden door lies on the floor. The smell of dust pervades the air, and the sound of thunder is muted here. Numerous body-shaped lumps are visible through the doorway, each wrapped carefully in layers of grey thread like woven mummies.

The real encounter here is not the room at the end of the hall, but the short hallway itself. The door to the room has long since rotted off its hinges, and the doorway is now covered by the web of a Medium monstrous spider. Any character walking toward the

doorway can make a DC 20 Spot check to notice the nearly invisible silk before walking into it. Any character who touches the web is caught as if in a net (see *Player's Handbook*, page 119), except that he is also unable to move from the doorway. The web can be destroyed by blows from weapons, though any weapon that comes in contact with it also sticks to its strands (DC 16 Str check to free a weapon). Only one creature can be stuck in the web at a time.

Web: DR 5/—, hp 6, break DC 16, Escape Artist DC 12.

Creature: The spider that wove the web is hiding on the ceiling, which is also covered with nearly-invisible webbing. It gains a circumstance bonus on Hide and Move Silently checks because of the webbing.

Medium Monstrous Spider: hp 11; Hide +15, Move Silently +11; see *Monster Manual*, page 288.

Tactics: The spider attacks (with surprise, if possible) as soon as a character gets stuck in or attacks the web in the doorway. It always attacks the nearest target, making no effort to avoid flanking maneuvers or eliminate more effective foes first. Since the spider is a web-spinner, it can throw webbing at targets, but it does so only if no character is currently entangled in a web.

Development: Once the spider has been dispatched and its webs rendered harmless, the characters can proceed into the room. The lumps in the chamber are the dead, mummified bodies of literally hundreds of rats, plus various humanoids.

Treasure: Hidden among the mummified corpses within the room are numerous rusted weapons and tattered clothes, all of which are worthless. On the floor, however, lies a 0-level *pearl of power* (see Appendix) and a bag that contains 75 gp. A DC 10 Search check is needed to find either of these items.

6. THE OFFERING CHEST (EL 1)

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter this chamber.

> This room is empty save for dust and a single, small, stone chest in the center of the floor. Evidently no one has disturbed this chamber for many years.

The stone chest is built into the floor and cannot be removed.

Chest: 4 in. thick stone walls, hardness 10, hp 60, break DC 28.

Trap: The lid of the chest is unlocked, but it is connected to a trap that fires a fusillade of darts at everyone in the same 5-foot square as the chest and in every square adjacent to it or sharing a corner with it. A character must be in the same square as the chest to open it unless she declares that she's opening it with a weapon or pole. Attacking the chest also sets off the trap.

Fusillade of Darts Trap: CR 1; mechanical, touch trigger (attached); manual reset; Atk +10 ranged (1d4+1, dart); multiple targets (fires one dart at every target in a 5-ft. square adjacent to the chest); Search DC 20; Disable Device DC 20; *Market Price:* 1,000 gp.

Treasure: The chest contains the *headband of the stout heart* (see Appendix), two pearls (worth 100 gp each), and a small bag containing 100 gp.

7. GETTING AHEAD (EL 1)

Read or paraphrase the following when the PCs enter this chamber.

> The only object of interest in this chamber is a statue at the far end. It resembles a sarcophagus standing upright, except that the head of the figure carved upon its lid looks distorted and seems to have tendrils instead of hair. A pair of batlike wings extends from its temples. Suddenly, its eyes open, revealing the glow of green flames, and the head flies forward to attack!

This chamber is the lair of a lesser vargouille that has hollowed out the head area of the sarcophagus lid to make itself a cozy nest.

Creature: The lesser vargouille is a very minor evil outsider.

Lesser Vargouille: CR 1; Small outsider (evil, extraplanar); HD 1d8+1; hp 5; Init +1; Spd fly 30 ft. (good); AC 12, touch 12, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +1; Grp 3; Atk or Full Atk +3 melee (1d4, bite); SA shriek; SQ darkvision 60 ft., outsider traits; AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +3; Str 10, Dex 13, Con 12, Int 5, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Hide +9, Intimidate +3, Listen +5, Move Silently +5, Spot +5; Weapon Finesse.

Shriek (Su): Instead of biting, a lesser vargouille can open its distended mouth and let out a terrible shriek. Each creature within 60 feet (except other vargouilles) who hear the shriek and can clearly see the creature must succeed on a DC 12 Fortitude save or be paralyzed with fear for 2d4 rounds or until the monster attacks them, goes out of range, or leaves their sight. A creature that successfully saves cannot

be affected again by the same lesser vargouille's shriek for 24 hours. The shriek is a mind-affecting fear effect.

Outsider Traits: A lesser vargouille cannot be raised or resurrected (though a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore life).

Tactics: The lesser vargouille screams during the first round of combat, then attacks the nearest foe still standing. If all the PCs are paralyzed, it moves and attacks each of them once, then repeats the process. As soon as someone recovers, the lesser vargouille concentrates its attacks on that character.

Treasure: Within the now-headless sarcophagus is a pile of dust and a *translator's ring* (see Appendix).

8. The Dark Knight (EL 2)

Read or paraphrase the following when the characters enter this chamber.

> A long, stone table dominates the center of this chamber, and bright bits of gold wink from within the dust that covers the floor. Upon the table lies the well-preserved corpse of a tall humanoid wearing the tabard and belts of a knight. Suddenly, the corpse sits up, lifting an old, rusted morningstar in one hand and a javelin in the other. As it climbs off the table, its mouth opens to loose an eerie moan.

The Dark Knight: Male bugbear zombie, 42 hp; see *Monster Manual*, page 267.

Possessions: Light wooden shield, morningstar, javelin, masterwork weapon*.

Tactics: On the first round of combat, the dark knight throws his javelin, even though that action doesn't make much sense tactically. After that, he charges to melee range and attacks the most obvious foe each round thereafter. Usually he chooses whichever PC dealt him the most damage in melee during the previous round.

If the Dark Knight is disarmed or his weapon is sundered, he switches to his secondary weapon, which is slung on his back.

Treasure: The morningstar that the Dark Knight is using is cracked and nearly worthless, and his other gear (including armor) is in no better condition. *But he does have a secondary weapon—a masterwork weapon of a type used by one or more of the PCs. (You can choose a weapon for a combat-based character who doesn't already have a masterwork weapon, or you can determine randomly which of the PCs' weapons the dark knight carries.) This weapon is worth 300 gp plus its base cost.

Also within the chamber are 250 gp, scattered about loose on the floor.

Concluding the Adventure

The adventure is over when the Dark Knight has been defeated and all the other monsters have been cleared out of the tor. Once those conditions have been met, the storm outside lessens and gradually blows itself out.

Further Adventures

The tribe of bugbears that sent out the two warriors encountered in area 4 is still interested in turning the tor into a base of operations. More bugbears arrive within the next few days, carrying supplies and tools with which they intend to alter the interior to suit their purposes. If the bugbears are not stopped, they establish a base within 2 weeks and begin raiding the surrounding countryside.

Furthermore, once the bugbears discover that their honored ancestor, the Dark Knight, has been slain by the PCs, they send occasional parties of warriors after them to seek revenge. Up to three of these parties are sent out before the tribe gives up its quest for vengeance.

Appendix: New Magic Items

This adventure features a few very minor new magic items. Each is described fully in this section.

Translator's Ring: This ring grants the wearer the ability to understand two specific languages in addition to those she already knows. If the character wearing the ring is literate, she also gains literacy in the new languages as long as she wears the ring.

For the purpose of this adventure, the ring offers access to two languages that none of the PCs speak, but that might prove useful in future adventures. Appropriate choices include Abyssal, Aquan, Auran, Draconic, Dwarven, Giant, Goblin, Ignan, Infernal, Orc, and Terran.

Faint divination; CL 1st; Forge Ring, *comprehend languages*; Price: 400 gp.

Headband of the Stout Heart: This simple leather headband is studded with small iron rivets. It grants its wearer a +1 resistance bonus on all Will saves.

Faint abjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *resistance*; Price: 350 gp.

Lifting Belt: This heavy leather kidney belt features brass studs and large buckles on both sides. Anyone wearing it gains a +1 enhancement bonus to Strength for the purpose of determining his carrying capacity. The belt does not alter the wearer's actual Strength score, nor does it change his Str modifier. This effect does not stack with that provided by any other bonus to Strength.

Faint conjuration; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, *bull's strength*; Price: 500 gp.

Pearl of Power (0-Level): This item acts just like a normal *pearl of power* (see page 263 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*), except that it allows the owner to recall a 0-level spell once per day.

Faint transmutation; CL 1st; Craft Wondrous Item, creator must be able to cast 0-level spells; Price: 500 gp.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Owen Kirker Clifford Stephens was born in 1970 in Norman, Oklahoma. He attended the TSR Writer's Workshop held at the Wizards of the Coast Game Center in 1997 and moved to the Seattle area in 2000, after accepting a job as a game designer at Wizards of the Coast, Inc. Fourteen months later, he returned to Oklahoma with his wife and three cats to pick up his freelance writer/developer career. He has author and coauthor credits on numerous *Star Wars*, d20 Modern, and *EverQuest* projects, as well as *Bastards and Bloodlines* from Green Ronin. He also has producer credits for various IDA products, including the Stand-Ins printable figures.